

Remarks in a Meeting of the White House Competition Council
July 19, 2023

Please, stay seated. Stay seated. Thank you. Hello, everybody. Good afternoon.

The reason we're late: It's all my fault. I know that's a shock. But I must tell you, I couldn't resist. Two of the—the children of a man and a woman who got me started in—back in 1972—it was actually 1970—were in town, and I showed them the office. And I apologize for keeping you waiting. I really am.

Look, this Competition Council is an important part of Bidenomics, my plan to build an economy from the middle out and the bottom up. And I think it's working. I think it's working.

For example, over the past year, we've seen a dramatic decline in inflation. It dropped by two-thirds—down to 3 percent—at a time when unemployment has been below 4 percent for the longest stretch in 50 years. I've rejected the notion that the reason for inflation is—the only way you get inflation down is reduce employment and/or reduce wages.

Remember, the experts said: To get inflation under control, we need to lower those wages and drive up unemployment. But I've never bought that. I don't think the problem in America today is too many people working or working people are making too much money.

Instead, we focused on getting America into the workforce—Americans into the workforce by fixing a broken supply chains and lowering costs. The fact is, companies made record-high profits during the pandemic. And now those costs are coming down and so is inflation. We need to keep bringing down the mark-ups and their margins and continue making progress on inflation.

And promoting competition helps lower cost as well.

Now, I've said this before: I'm a capitalist, but I have no problem with companies making reasonable profits. But it's got to be a fair competition for that to occur.

Before I took office, more than three-quarters of the American industries had become more concentrated than they are—than they were before. Often, just a handful of companies dominate the marketplace. Bidenomics is about increasing competition, not stifling competition. When companies have to compete, it means lower prices, fairer wages, and more innovation.

That's why, 2 years ago, I signed an Executive order to create this Council to increase competition and lower costs for American households.

For example, we made hearing aids available over the counter for as little as \$200 a pair, instead of thousands of dollars, and capped the price of insulin at \$35 on—those on Medicare, and thus saving folks hundreds of thousands of dollars over time.

You know, we aim to we're taking aim at noncompete clauses, which prevent 30 million Americans—from security guards to retail workers—from getting jobs in the same field. And there's no rationale for that. It's not like they have trade secrets.

And we're cracking down on junk fees across industries, including banking, concert, airlines, and junk health insurance plans. Folks are tired of being played for suckers. They're just tired of being played for suckers. And it's about basic fairness.

Today we're taking more action.

First, the Department of Agriculture—and you'll hear from the Secretary in a moment—together with bipartisan attorneys general in 31 States and the District of Columbia are ramping up enforcement of antitrust and consumer protection laws in food and in agriculture.

For example, just four supermarket companies control over a third—a third—of the market nationwide. And it's even more concentrated at the local level, where consumers have been—have had even fewer stores to choose from. Groceries in consolidated markets will charge you more because you have nowhere else to shop.

Now the Department of Agriculture and partners in the States are going to make large corporations—making sure they cannot artificially raise food prices through price fixing and price gouging.

Second, we're cracking down on hidden junk fees in rental housing. Folks at home know having to pay \$100 or more just to fill out a rental application, even though the credit check can cost as little as \$20. The application fees can be a profit center for landlords.

Some accept applications from hundreds of potential tenants, far more than they could seriously consider renting to, just to collect these fees. And then some charge surprise fees just to pay your rent online or fees for services that should be included in rent, like mail sorting and pest control. It's simply not right, and we're going to move on it.

Now several real estate companies serving tens of millions of renters, including Zillow, apartments.com, affordablehousing.com—they have joined us to take action against these junk fees. They're updating their websites to show renters all the hidden fees up front so you can know the full cost before they sign a lease.

Third, this morning, the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission released their new Merger Guidelines. Anticompetitive mergers can hurt people and drive up costs as well.

For example, hospital mergers have led to price increases of 20 percent or more. Health insurance mergers have caused premiums to go up 7 percent on average. All told, this kind of industry concentration costs the typical American household an estimated \$5,000 a year.

And I've said when I signed the Executive order, we cannot accept bad mergers that lead to mass layoffs, higher prices, and fewer options for workers and consumers.

I'll close with this: To get this meeting started, I've said before: Capitalism—I've said before, capitalism without competition isn't capitalism; it's exploitation. And I'm grateful to this Competition Council as we keep building on this momentum to reduce cost and deliver more results for the American people.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Secretary Vilsack. Mr. Secretary.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:28 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Vilsack, Thomas J.

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